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Fall
2007

Voices Fall 2007

Voices is produced each fall and spring semester by students enrolled in JRN 139 under the direction of Assistant Professor Molly Sides, with the help of Instructor Scott Fustin.

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ROCK VALLEY COLLEGE
ESTELLE M. BLACK
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Voices policies:
Submissions are accepted from students, faculty, staff, and members of the community. All submissions are considered by the *Voices* staff each semester and rated through a blind voting process. All submitted work in each genre is given equal consideration, and winners are chosen based on numerical rank. Acceptance and publication of work is based on artistic quality as percieved by the student editorial staff. The views or opinions expressed in this magazine are those held by the authors and artists.

GIFT

Poetry & Prose

Eire
Cillian

Inlets of emerald seas sever through an isle of green
Ravaging fields with frayed walls of stone
Even the trees shiver in the wind – a history so cold
Longing for inconceivable tranquility to rest with clenched eyes
And dragging breaths caressing hoary clover-covered hills
No more shattered gold fallen from bloody sunsets and
Drowned in war-torn dreams gathering on the asphalt

Befallen
Mike Copas

Leaves fall as Fall is winded
branches creak like clacking bones
Hot Breath of Summer is recinded

doldrums paint the sky in cobblestones
gray, absent of all color
Decaying incense paints the breezy moans

dew meets the grass with ardor
soon to harden, crystalline
cold and dead as Mordor

Drizzle patters, alkaline
and plays a tune on fallen leaves
Orange-yellow icy sheen

a toothy grin deceives
the warm flickering flame denies
a pumpkin face that really greives

Silent weeping in its eyes
Silent, sleeping, cold demise

Man on the Corner
Debbie Hallowell

Busy places travlin e'ry day
People see, pass naught to say.

Man on the corner, no complaint
People don't know yet image do taint.

Skinny, unshaven to others unclean
Purple Heart under coat goes unseen.

Man on the corner, pride hath fled
Memory of glory, blood once shed.

Valiance before tries not to think
Poor soul from humanities shrink.

Man on the corner, never the less
Unknown to some others, feelings transgress.

Liberty, ours he fought for
Risking life on far way shore.

Man on the corner, night's first glance
Ridicule this, my first chance.

He said naught a word, tho ahead staring
Mean words long ago uncaring.

Man on the corner, news on night
Died saving girl from blazing plight.

This past soldier was like no other
Man on the corner, was my brother.

First Inquisition
Matt Mickelson

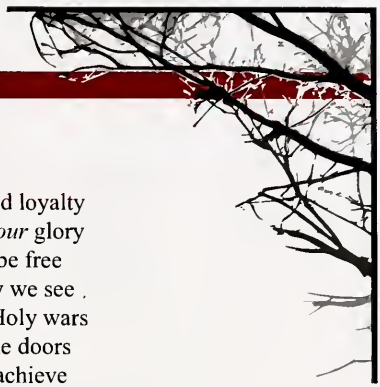
They set good aside when the coffers run dry
And their fears arm the weapons that aim when they lie
Tomorrow will come with a red rising sun
When they persecute all who are not of the One
There are Twos, Threes, and Fours who believe in a course
That may differ in image, may fight different wars
But condemning their souls when the same are their goals
Leads them far from salvation, two quite different poles

Soon the armies would see through His wine; fading gleams
In the eyes of their enemies- towards dark they leaned
They looked to the heavens and searched for their brethren
Who promised to guide them when *they* became dead men
In this hint they'd seen it, the men God had deemed fit
For judgment were really of both flesh *and* spirit
The same courage drives them and strengthens and binds them
The same power holds them, consoles them, resides in them

Suddenly hoards who had taken up swords
Had been willing to die for these distorted Lords
Dropped their cold iron blades that were forged for crusades
And refused to be puppets and pushed to their graves
A new light had shone on this casting of stones
And the soldiers of God began to atone
For the sins of their past, and the sins of their caste
And the most vital questions that they'd never asked

So together they marched, through the gargoyle arch
On a quest to bequeath to their high Patriarch
A resignation of sorts, from this corrupted court
Which had condemned their lives from *genus* to *mort*
The good Father frowned as their words did confound him
And he felt for the first time their presence around him
His consciousness fractured in nightmares of rapture
These sheep were no longer content with their pasture

One man stepped forth.



"We value our honor, our courage and loyalty
You took us captive, abused us for *your* glory
You lied and told us we fought to be free
Now our eyes are open, now clearly we see
You no longer command us to fight Holy wars
To batter-down, fire, smash open the doors
That lead to the power you lust to achieve
By fusing your righteousness, pride, wrath, and greed"

The good Father listened while sweat brightly glistened
His God had denied him the strength for this mission
And so he did shiver, no words to deliver
His face began slowly to tremble and quiver
Those cowardly eyes gave away his surprise
That those who had long knelt could possibly rise
But he stuttered and choked on the faith they revoked
And regaining composure he frantically spoke:

"Please brothers, have reason! I meant you no harm
Let's talk and I'll show there's no cause for alarm
Away put your anger and soon you'll attest
That this sinful behavior must be put to rest!
It's blasphemy! Heresy! Work of the devil!
In his merciless kingdom you'll surely not revel!
The words you have spoken are evil indeed
God's love and forgiveness from here you will need"

But with that they turned, and the free men adjourned
The first inquisition: they no longer yearned
To prostrate their skill, to conquer and kill
In the name of His glory or ultimate will
Now the light was within and it helped them begin
A world without ignorance, judgment, or sin
They started to run towards that big, golden sun
Their minds were at peace with a new age begun.

About the Lovelies in my Class

Oliveur M. Marquise

Don't you see all this me
Wanting to be anything?

[End prologue.]

I.
Wednesday, high in Shakespeare, she's talking Ptolemy-
She calls him pTOL-mey and it seems funny.
What is she doing up there, talking about the crystalline sphere?
with a fire in her eyes, "The Angels live up there." Fie, I bet
they do, sweetheart. Sweep that aging bronze hair from your forehead
as again curls unfurl with time as your feats weaken and deplete.
You don't love poetry enough not to die, doll. Listen to His lilt
of rhythm and cadence. It's music.
And yet, you are not, are you? Around the edges, perhaps?
Just in the corners.
Lickity split is coming.

II.
Were there a poem
Floating up and around
The mahogany hair that twirls
And flips betwixt your fingertips
pull, I'd to find it in perception,
by your voice's sound-
it, and the belong'd smile,
I've filed into my hearts full.
The Bloom of Oberon's flower
could no more
allow me see thee
with even one degree
more startling clarity.

A courageous wit, founded
by yours, a vegetable-, soul,
within your perfect and trite
family you perform.
A bashful face comported to all others
as I have watched you aback

more than merely a day
and though maybe my jocular behavior
is quite alack-
I think you're funny, honey!-
Pray, let conversation stay.

[First Interlude.]

When in disgrace
crying madly in streets,
I forget to look
Around for anyone
but you.

III.
Au*burn* her hair grows out.
Bangs sitting across and atop her thick plaid frames
holding her to a fingerprint smeared perception
Though she dreams of California sand
Time drains the eye of sequin
as Autumn'd auburn hair gets cut short-er..er…er.
It's as if now single from divorce.

And then a new set of looking glass,
a new sequined set of eyes.
Did she ever make or Make it there-
to that hot rock and turn'd glass (where lottery like love awaited)-
The little Auburn-haired girl,
who dreamed of a girl dreaming of happiness
so that she could dream her realm where dreams are dreamt
with the intention of supplemented vindication upon existence.

Still withal- with or without the sunbeam'd skin and teeth,
Her freckles shimmer with the hope of Western sun,
Speckled like a banner, as of all wandering bark sailing constant,
guided by sequined stars at night.

[A Second Interlude Concerning a Short Vision.]
A Man with his heart on fire is standing beneath a tree!
The reds of burning carnage are spread upon his antennae fists
as he raises them up, lighting his surroundings.

IV.
The reflective stars on your arms
Call me to shoot, like them, for your heart-
Heaven in your hold between three pulsing fires
    Chest, arm and arm.

Las, that she was
    holding her pen within the webbing
Between her second and third digits
        She played
Clasping pen fast when I did press my hand upon it.
        A Break and Twice. A force I placed, she holds against
as the pen slips slowly in sweat.
The Friction Resistance.
I wait- heart exploding for more than utensil touches.
I can't take her home, where awaits my girl, away also from her Roger, beholden.
Thrice.
    We smile in class
Knowing our love's end,
Just pushing pens
    -in the back of class-
While the professor pontificates Shakespeare.

[An Epilogue.]
Now I hold the everything together

with my love
and might

I like kissing starry eyes
Go'dnight!

Grip a hip,
for life!

Fury
Kyle Pratt

She sang a song like a seraph scorned

That choked my heart with crystal twine

I cannot say I was not warned

She sang a song like a seraph scorned

I must admit my mind is torn

I know not how to pay my fine

She sang a song like a seraph scorned

That choked my heart with crystal twine

Rising Memories
Kyle Pratt

You can still summon the memory of the black swan on the pond,
as rosy light broke over willow fronds.
While I rose, like the sun, upon
the mysteries of you, *inamorata*.
If only I could cause time to withdraw
and sink the sun to draw
the moonlight back upon your luring jaw.

You can still summon the memory of the black swan on the pond,
as day broke and washed night beyond
our reach. The smile you donned
sank with it, *inamorato*.
How saddened by the doves mourning solo,
and the watchmen's low
whisper signaling we must go.

You can still summon the memory of the black swan on the pond,
as I waited for your permission
that I might go beyond
your father's reach and law.
But I will return from Artrois,
as the sun sets in awe
of your beauty my dear, *inamorata*.

Three-Tango-Mike

Cillian

Wearing my wings proudly, I traipsed through the observation room – passing all the national trophies that flaunted my name set in gold and sterling, and the medals hanging on display across the wall.

The sounds of roaring engines and static voices was dulled in my ears by a constant shrill ringing that was ironically the result of so many years enduring those very noises.

Outside, I could see nothing but clear blue skies – tainted slightly with the hues of a soon to be brilliant sunset – and a stagnant flag. However, the icy air slapped me in the face as I stepped through the door onto the asphalt. I quickly buttoned my collar and pushed my hands into my pockets. The bitter weather made the short walk out to the hanger feel like a lifetime. And the dark interior of the structure was no relief.

The pre-flight spent another lifetime, and when I towed my Skyhawk onto the taxiway, my fingers were numb and my lungs hurt from breathing in the cold air. But when I finally climbed into the cockpit, my worries melted and I whispered to my sweetheart, "It's been a long time."

Her metallic curves were smooth and cold to the touch, but the only thought that passed through my mind as my fingers tightened over the throttle was, "Yeah…a long time."

I went over every checklist and test that had been seared into my head as I taxied to the runway. My own mechanical voice began breathing a familiar and tediously memorized script into the radio – the choreography of words between "Cessna three-tango-mike" and "Palwaukee tower" that I had danced a thousand times. Then my heart skipped a beat, as it always did, when I heard those three tender words, "Clear for takeoff."

A grin crept across my lips as I evenly pushed forward on the throttle. Somehow, no matter how hard I drove my foot into the accelerator of my SAAB, I could never seem to imitate the feelings that streamed through me as thousands of pounds of thrust indulgently began to push forward over the runway.

Only seconds passed before I eased on the controls and the ground disappeared – replaced by a boundless sea of sky that was my freedom and my passion.

The next few minutes brought me over Lake Michigan at a cruising altitude of ten thousand feet. As I gradually left the skyline behind and braved into the horizon, I felt my hands shaking. "Is this it?" I asked aloud. But neither my love nor my passion would answer me.

A sigh escaped my lips as memories began to strain through my thoughts eventually reliving the one call I had dreaded my entire life, one call that would clip my wings and ground me forever: "You have cancer."

I shook away the thought; the sun was setting in a dizzying array of rich, warm colours that danced in their reflections on the waves. I glanced out over the horizon once more, remembering the first time I had ever flown. The excitement that had been set ablaze in my eyes – and that would burn like an inferno every time I took to the sky

Then the steady hum of the engine reminded me of what I had to do.

"I guess it is." I whispered as I cut the engine and watched the sunset disappear into the lake.

The Perfect Daughter

Mandy Dennis

I am a thrust towards the velvet night sky. I giggle, and wave to my family smiling below me. I reach out my hands and touch the stars. My fingers intermingle between the warm glow. I am an innocent child looking down on the world and playing in the sky. I grow up above them, all on my own, watching my family live.

Forced to be independent but only to a degree. Their eyes are always watching me. I am the chosen one, the only one. The only daughter. I have to make them proud; I am the only one.

"Daughter!" My family calls out.

"Yes, family?" I answer.

"You need to be beautiful. Will you be beautiful for us daughter?"

"Yes, family," I say, knowing it is a lie.

Studying my body and face, I stand in front of the mirror for hours, I am filled with disgust. My family could never love anyone like this. I am not beautiful enough for them. I have to make them proud; I have to make them love me.

I paint a beautiful mask. I give it rosy cheeks and red lips. I put the mask to my face but it does not fit. I become frightened if I am not beautiful they will not love me. I frantically search for ways to hold it to my face. I tie a string to it and it stays.

"Daughter!" My family calls out.

"Yes, family?" I answer.

"You need to be strong in mind and body. Will you be strong for us daughter?"

"Yes, family," I say, knowing it is a lie.

I am a weak daughter. I am made with an unintelligent mind and a fragile frame. I need to be strong for them. I am the only one, and they need me to be strong. I study over volumes of literature and history, learning some, but forgetting more. I hide my failures and flaunt my success, to make them proud. I try to make myself stronger in my body but the weights are too heavy to lift, so I ignore them, and pretend to have strength.

"Daughter!"

"Yes, family?" I answer.

"You need to be perfect. Will you be perfect for us?"

"Yes, family," I say, knowing it is a lie.

I make a long, flowing white gown. I put new, tighter strings on my mask. I study over literature and the world. I fly around the sky, giving myself more strength. I make myself perfect for my family, so they will be proud and love me.

I stand above them, the white dress being blown about by the wind.

"Are you perfect now, daughter?" They ask.

"Yes, family," I say, knowing it is a lie.

I smile down at them, just as I used to. I try to touch the stars, but I cannot find any. I look down again and all I see are angry stares.

Five swords come flying up below me. They hover a few feet away from me, pointing at me.

"Are you beautiful now, daughter?" They yell.

"Yes, family, I am beautiful," I sob.

One of the swords goes into my stomach as my mask falls off. I gasp; they know I am not beautiful.

Two of the swords leave the group and hover inches away from me.

"Are you strong, daughter?" They scream.

"Yes, family, I am strong!" I yell.

One sword goes into my right wrist and the other goes into my left. I cry, they know I am not strong.

I hear angry yells from below me. I have made them all so angry and disappointed. Another starts to come towards me and plunges into my neck. They know I have lied.

I look down at my dress, once white, now black with my blood. My body burns from the swords.

I begin to slowly fall from the sky, the last sword falling at the same pace as I. I land on the hard ground and look around me. There is no one there. I look up and see the angry stares. The sword comes at me and stops inches away from my heart.

"Are you perfect now, daughter?" They scream.

As a single tear rolls down my cheek, I realize that I cannot trick them into loving me. They will only love perfection, and I am not perfect.

"No, family, I am not perfect," I whisper.

The sword stabs through my heart and it twists on its own.

I fall over, and cry. Imperfection swallows me, and I lie there exposed and bare.

"I am sorry I cannot be perfect!" I gasp.

All the Names She Overheard Meant Nothing in Her Father's Hold

Zechs B. Cichon

Jeffery Cichon was a successful businessman, the new CEO of the company his father started twenty-eight years prior, married to the pulchritudinous Sue, with two darling little girls, aged eleven and three, Shawna and Sasha, respectively. The family also consisted of a Bichon Poodle named Mickey.

His wife Sue, a desirable minx on the edge of the beau monde, had many needs: a lipstick red Camaro, Donald A. Gardner designed brick house decorated by Kara Mann, of course, and surrounded by a lush Fletcher Steele landscape, an InGround swimming pool encircled by giant boulders, all sitting on acres of spread at the end of a prominent Lake Forest neighborhood. Needy, up to these demands, would have been an appropriate moniker for Sue, however, these were only the beginnings. So much was her furling dragon greed that although Jeff was more than willing to fill debt to his eyeballs, so that, today, all he could see he owed, to keep her around to look at, paw at, love with, she could not find happiness no matter what she wanted, and her insatiable appetite for the popular, worldly things certainly kept her wanting.

While Jeff could watch at the Marble countertops, from where he cooked nightly after work, her eyes wrinkle and flash in despondency and despair at their children, their behavior, or the kids' beauty reflecting her paling skin, he feigned those looks to be love. So while I would rest the blame for the following conversations occurrence on his behavior (for he did love Sue- even knowing "deep down" [as the aphorism goes] that she, in fact, loved nothing) as well as hers, I must tell you that I find it hard to question the heart of a man convicted to keep his family *his family* no matter the cost, because, to him, besides watching his two darling canaries plume and preen, it all meant nothing.

So the day after an argument with Sue (no kidding, concerning a new John Deere for Jeff, which she wanted because "only the riff-raff use the same mower during three consecutive summer seasons") he was prepared for the worst coming home on the train from Chicago. It would be his Kumara Gratin with Herbs de Provence for dinner tonight. He also wondered all about Shawna's science test, more topically if she would remember his method for distinguishing Cumulus clouds from the Cirrus type.

Wielding his heavy Knotty Alder door, he swung open and into his home.

"Daddy," Sasha said.

"Hello, Sasha! How are you, my dear? Come give daddy a hug."

She hesitated.

"Don't be so timid, my lovely." Jeff said, settling down his suitcase to the floor, as he began to take off his jacket.

"Sorry, Daddy, but Mommy told me not to touch you…" she trailed off, biting her lip, and then said, "That you don't really love Mommy…or me."

Any lesser man's heart pangs searing with the wickedness it would take to be so malicious to a heart so precious as that of your three-year-old daughter, but Jeff, with the weight of a thousand worlds of trouble, merely flicked open his arms, wide as the sky. And Sasha certainly saw no other way to express her big, overflowing heart than running, quick as she could, to her father's arms.

The Rain
Sarah Stolberg

The day of the rain began like any other day in mid-June. The sun rose, swallowed the sky, and by 7:00AM the outdoor temperature read eighty degrees. The Midwest was suffering severely from a drought; sidewalks were cracked, trees had sandpaper leaves, and birdbaths gathered dust. Farmers prayed for rain.

Three days ago, a strange thing happened that gave the whole town quite a scare. Branden Prairie is home to the United States' third largest nuclear power plant. Residents near the plant were woken up early that morning to an unusual, high-pitched hum coming from the south tower. Soon after that, the town experienced a series of short black-outs. Naturally, people were concerned.

"It's been hit!" Mrs. Dowers told everybody at church the following day. "The terrorists have attacked the plant!" She also taught Sunday school, and that Sunday, she taught her twelve-year old students about nuclear meltdowns instead of divine intervention.

At the Pick'N Pack grocery store, the cashier that always smells like a handful of stale cigarettes announced her own theory. "Jay Wayland was working that tower yesterday morning," she pointed out, "everybody knows he spends all Friday night watching baseball and funneling down the High Life faster than fat kids at a pie eating contest. He was probably too hung over to push the right buttons at the right time."

The excited citizens of Branden Prairie continued to speculate and gossip until the news later that evening conducted a live report with the power plant CEO, Michael Burmsnick. He concluded that one of the four main computers had suddenly crashed causing the alarms to sound. It was unusual, he admitted, that the reboot process caused the short wave of power failures, but assured everybody that there was no need to worry. "The plant is fully functional," he confidently explained, "safety is our top priority."

Monday came and went without a noteworthy event. The small farming community began to settle down and rumors of Chernobyl-like horrors were put to rest. On my drive to work Tuesday morning, the radio weatherman forecasted another dry day smothered in sunshine.

I pulled in to the Electronic Hut at quarter to nine and opened the store. Four years ago, my wife, Laney, was offered a job as superintendent of Branden Prairie High School. At the time, we were living just outside of New York City; Laney had recently won a 'Teacher of the Year' award and I was working at a scarcely busy computer repair company. The superintendent position really appealed to her and so we relocated to "Home of the Corn Festival", Iowa. Her new position with Branden High provided the finances needed to buy this little wires and gadgets franchise.

Ducking behind the service counter, I found my CD wallet.

Oh, how to start the day? I thought. Queen? Not right now. Tool? It's too sunny for Tool. ABBA?! How'd that get in there?

"Ah, ha!" I said. I selected 'open' on the CD player and carefully placed my choice in the tray. As Journey's "Wheel in the Sky" started to play, I hopped over the desk and began flipping the power switches that provide life to all the electronic inhabitants of the store.

A row of twelve televisions clicked on, computers began to boot, and video cameras began to monitor and broadcast my untalented dance moves. Live video feeds came in to six of the TV's; three cameras (set up

in the display window) watched the activity on the sidewalk and three watched the small, crowded showroom. The rest of the TV's played DVD's or were set to ESPN. All were currently on mute so they wouldn't drown out Journey's Greatest Hits.

While the store mechanically hummed along to the music, I moved to the "Employees Only" office to start the first batch of coffee and wait for Brad to arrive fifteen minutes late.

At 9:15 I was enjoying my coffee when Brad ran through the front door.

"Steve! Hey Steve!", he yelled.

"Yeah, I know, your alarm didn't go off; it won't happen again," I said. "It's no big deal."

"No, no! I've got an even better excuse!" he defended. "Have you seen the plant this morning?"

"I noticed it, yes. What about it?"

"Did you notice the weird, green smoke?" he asked.

"There's always smoke coming from those stacks, Brad," I pointed out.

"Not like this," he said with wide eyes as he scratched his head, "go check it out, boss, but if it's nothing out of the ordinary, then you'd better tell that to all the people standing around outside."

Smart ass, I thought as I got up to take a look. There were several people lingering around on the sidewalks and they were all looking towards the towers. A gust of hot, dry air shoved its way past me as I opened the door and stepped outside. The Electronic Hut was on the east side of Turner Street. Turner ran north to south with city hall sitting atop the north end and a wide, clear view of the towers to the south end.

I turned my attention to the south and what I saw made my skin prickle. The sight of that eerie, moss colored smoke filled my stomach with a maggot-like sensation; tiny larva blindly groped my insides. But it wasn't just the color of the smoke that was dreadful, there was something else. I don't think I noticed it at first; I knew the smoke looked *wrong*, but it took me a minute to really understand why. There was plenty of wind, but the smoke wasn't moving-wasn't billowing like it should. Instead, it ran in a perfect column from the top of the smoke stacks right into the clouds. The smoke was funneling upward as though it were being siphoned from the plant with a giant, clear straw.

"Don't see that ev'day, do ya?" The gruff voice startled me. Mr. Kromer, of Kromer's Hardware, had shuffled up behind me.

"I don't get it," I said.

"The color?" he asked.

"Maybe Betty Crocker added some food coloring," I joked, "but why isn't the wind affecting the smoke? It should be blowing halfway across the horizon."

"Maybe there's no wind under them ugly clouds." Mr. Kromer motioned towards the sky with a toothpick that he plucked from his mouth. I followed his gaze and again was disturbed by what I saw. The clouds seemed to be *absorbing* the smoke. The sickly green hue was accumulating in patches throughout the enormous gathering of puffy monsters.

"They're only above the plant," I accidentally said, meaning the thought to remain silent in my head.

"What are?" Kromer asked.

"The clouds. All the clouds are centered directly above the plant. The rest of the sky is clear" I explained. "It's not supposed to rain today."

"Huh," he observed. "Well, I don't know nuthin about weather. Only things I care about are in my store, which I'd better get back to in case somebody gets the urge to buy an umbrella."

"I think I'll do the same." I nodded in

friendly 'see you later' way and headed back into the Hut.

Brad, who had been seated in the display window, jumped up and jogged around in front of me. "Well? It's weird, right?" he asked.

"Yeah, Brad, it's weird," I agreed. "Why don't you try to get the local news or weather on one of the TVs? I'm going to call Laney at the school."

"Okey-dokey," he said.

In the office, I took a seat at my desk and ran both hands over the peach fuzz on my head. Laney had never been comfortable living so close to the plant; she wanted to buy a house in Mason, which was twenty miles north of Branden Prairie, and commute to work. I had found the affordable, two bedroom ranch with attached garage and I had convinced Laney to live here.

"For the two of us, it's great," she'd said, "but what happens if we have kids? What if they build playhouses out of oozing chemical barrels?"

"Chemical barrels hardly ever ooze," I joked. The look I got in return was not pleasant. "Laney, dear," I coaxed and took her hand, "we don't have children and if *and when* we do, we can always move, but the plant is safe. Look at the neighbor kids-they don't look like they've been splashing in radium puddles, do they?"

That got her to giggle a bit. "I guess not. And the house is perfect," she admitted.

Now, with my own concern growing, I had to call my beloved wife and....what? Cause her to worry as well? Tell her to stay inside? Check up on the school's nuclear malfunction procedures? I suddenly felt like I was making a bigger deal out of it than I should be.

Brad swung around the doorframe and poked his head into the office. His big ears and dark eyes made him look like a koala hugging a tree. "Nothing on the news or weather about big, green clouds," he said. "I checked every station and we're still expected to be high and dry."

"Alright, thanks for the update," I said. My nerves were beginning to communicate less with my brain anyhow. *It's just some smoke, no big deal. It's like London fog.* I picked up the phone and dialed the school. The line was silent for a long time; I almost hung up to redial when I was connected with an obnoxiously loud buzzing. I yanked the phone away from my ear so fast I almost pulled it off the desk. I hung up and dialed again, but got the same, ear-bleeding response. I pulled my cell phone out of my pants pocket and flipped it open. SEARCHING FOR SIGNAL scrolled across the screen while an animated cell tower mocked the device's attempt to make a connection.

"This is ridiculous," I mumbled. "Hey, Brad! Does your cell have a signal right now?"

Returning to his marsupial-like position at the door, Brad flipped his phone open. "Nope, it sure doesn't. That's weird; I always have a full signal here."

"Yeah, so do I," I said. "The land line isn't working either." I rolled backwards in my desk chair and gave the office phone one last, frustrated look before heading back into the showroom. "Let's see if WLSE is talking about it." WLSE is the AM radio station in Mason. *Surely they could see the smoke*, I thought. *People must be calling in, if they're able to.* Brad followed me over to the radio and CD player aisle. I switched on a radio and tuned the dial to AM 5100.

The voice was very faint, but somewhat understandable, "...you posted on any changes that...*BUZZ*...no further reports from... *BUZZ*...."

"Great," I grunted and shoved the radio away from me. "That noise is ruining the radio reception as well."

Brad had slowly backed out of the radio isle and was staring at the row of televisions. "Whoa!" he stammered, "Come check out the doppler, Steve!"

I rushed over and examined the screen. Channel 4 News was now displaying a live doppler radar image of northern Iowa. Directly over Branden Prairie was a blip and with each circle of the radar's arm, the blip grew. The clouds over the nuclear plant were spreading out. The showroom suddenly darkened and for a second I thought the power had gone out, but then realized that the televisions were still on. "The clouds...," I murmured.

Brad and I went to the window and watched as giant, lizard-colored clouds marched over Turner Street like floats in a Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. The infected blanket above us was stretching itself out over the town. The little sunlight that managed to filter through made everything look a nauseating yellow-green. I felt like a bug trapped in a pickle jar.

"I've got to get this on tape!" Brad yelled and before I could stop him, he'd snagged a camera out of the display window and ran outside. He was standing in the middle of the street, camera pointed upward recording the procession of clouds. A few others had gone back outside as well, or maybe they never went in. The blip on the radar had grown to an oblong bulge that not only covered all of Branden Prairie, but several of the surrounding towns.

Concerned, I headed to the door to tell Brad to come back inside. He was turning the camera over in his hands, trying to replay the video, when it began to rain. Brad jumped like he'd been electrocuted and nearly dropped the camera, then ran madly towards the store waving his free arm above his head like he was swatting at flies. "Open the door! Open the door!" he shouted.

Horrified, I swung the door open and as he ran in, my eyes and nose were assaulted with a painful, stinging sensation. I dropped to my knees, letting the door close on its own, and rubbed my eyes. "What the hell is that?!" I yelled. "It feels like somebody just threw ammonia in my face!"

"It burns!" Brad cried, "Get it off me!" He was rolling around on the showroom floor, tugging at his Electronic Hut polo. I scrambled over to him and pulled the damp shirt off over his head. He used it to quickly dry his hair and mop up any rain on his arms and face, then threw it angrily to the side. Now that he was done flopping around, I could see hundreds of tiny burns swelling up all over his exposed skin. It looked like somebody had tortured his arms, hands, and face with a hot curling iron.

"That's not rain!" he screamed, choking back tears. "That's acid! It's like pure acid falling from the sky!" Holding his trembling arms out, he examined the damage.

"Hold on, Brad. I'll grab the first aid kit.". I sprinted into the office and found the dusty, unopened first aid kit behind the canister of coffee beans. Since it was an electronics store, I had bought the kit containing ointment for burns, although I'd never imagined an employee getting burned like this.

I brought the ointment and some bandages over to Brad. "Thanks. Look at that," he said and pointed out the window. Steam was rising from the pavement and a foul, sulfuric odor was seeping into the building. The rain fell in a bizarre, calculated manner. The droplets fell in columns of evenly spaced attacks, each one hitting its defenseless target and sizzling like grease in a frying pan. It didn't even sound like normal rain. There were no random

drops; they fell with rhythm, like militant troops marching from the sky.

"What do we do?" Brad asked, rubbing the antiseptic gel on his arms.

"Wait for it to stop, I guess," I replied. "Are you o.k.?"

"I'll live," he said and smiled like he wasn't really sure about his answer. "What about the other people that were outside?"

I got up and peered out the window in both directions. Nobody was trapped outside, but through the shop windows of neighboring businesses, I saw plenty that were trapped inside. "They're all inside, like us," I said.

"The doppler's gone," Brad said.

"What?" I didn't understand what Brad was talking about until he nodded towards the televisions. Six were rolling screens of black and white static; three displayed the images of Brad and me in the showroom from various angles; the remaining two were broadcasting the live, rain of terror show happening outside. "The signal's gone," I said. "The weather from hell probably destroyed the satellite feed."

"Of all the towns and shit-holes in the world, why'd the devil decide to spit on ours?" Brad wasn't looking good; he was shaking more violently and wavered like he was going to be sick.

"Why don't you lie down in the office? Sleep for a while and I'll wake you up when the rain stops," I said.

"Will it stop?" he asked.

"The devil has to run out of spit sometime, right?" I said in a voice falsely filled with hope.

The terrible stew flowed from the sky for seven straight hours. It was 5:30PM when it stopped just as suddenly as it had begun.

The air was thick with the rotting, sulfuric smell and the streets were filled with foggy, steaming puddles. I waited until 6:30 and then woke up Brad and told him to go home to his family. "Keep your windows rolled up just in case," I cautioned him. He said nothing, just walked out the door and pulled himself into his small, Volkswagen Jetta and drove off.

I quickly locked up the store and drove to the school to get Laney. It took some time to find her in the mob of terrified parents plucking their children from the over-crowded gymnasium. We drove home together, her hand gripping my leg as we passed nightmarish horrors along the road. There were hundreds of tiny, feathered, blood stains on the pavement. "Those poor birds," Laney said quietly.

We passed a fenced-in yard with a chain leading to a discolored collar restraining some bones and matted fur. The BEWARE OF DOG sign was faded and hung crookedly by one, rusty nail. The cattle pastures were bone yards steeped high with immense ribcages dripping fleshy leftovers onto the ground.

"Oh, no!" Laney squeaked and pointed to a wide, open hay field. There was a tractor about a quarter of a mile out; smoke was still puffing from its stack, but the farmer was nowhere to be seen.

Once at home, we wasted no time in gathering a few important items, and then we left the burnt remains of Branden Prairie behind us forever.

Art & Photography

Tractor
Scott Fustin

Everyday
Adam Cantrell

Into the Blue
Jeff Boyd

My Blue Angels
Jeff Boyd

The De Soto
Cillian

Untitled
Aaron T. Hall

.ascension.
Aryn Kresol

.the factory.
Aryn Kresol

Memory
Do Yhup Pyun

Jeff Boyd Don't let the misnomer title distract you from this beauty. With such depth, color, and focus while retaining texture and definition of this sort, Into the Blue, from our photography section, is nothing short of astonishing. Jeff couldn't be reached for comment.

Adam Cantrell likes drawing. Go to Ollaver.com for more artwork, music, and loreful yarns this summer.

Zechs B. Cichon An impecunious, family-loving casuist who is presently in the midst of writing an entire cannon of lore concerning his Cichon bloodline. He has gained recent notoriety for his bellicose concupiscence which he curbs with extreme exercises in folly. His sister, N., accurately labeled him "a captious, inveigling sangfroid." In her appellation he finds she was being cursory.

Cillian, an RVC anonym, contributed to three sections of this issue: poetry, prose, and photography, making him the most ubiquitous of all contributors. His poem, complementing the longer works with its brevity, is a gingery piece that doesn't let its length affect its eloquence. Cillian's fantastic picture of "THE DESOTO HOUSE" with its excellent depth of field and lines following his lead to the point of infinity, without distracting from the focus of the picture- the sun streaming unseen upon the empty street and barren windows, makes its appearance in the magazine a no-brainer.

Mike Copas was a stellar student in Professor Sides' Eng. 108 (Intro. to Creative Writing) class this fall. He wrote the poem "Befallen" as an assignment and with thoughtful revisions turned it in to the piece you see here. Mike has since left RVC to pursue bigger and better things, but we hope he hasn't put down his pen.

Mandy Dennis is 19 years old. This is her second year, and last semester at Rock Valley. In the fall she will be attending Hollins University (her dream school) in Roanoke, Virginia. This is Mandy's first short story. Mandy is inspired by everyone she meets, everyday of her life. She loves music, reading and writing. She would like to dedicate this story to her favorite person, Matt Brenden, who has always encouraged her, in everything she does.

Scott Fustin is an instructor in the Graphic Arts technology program at Rock Valley College and co-advisor to *Voices*. He is the proud father of Brooke, his two year old daughter who is apparently learning to be a farmer (at least one would think so judging by his award-winning painting featured in this issue). Voices would not happen without him. He is Molly's hero, and she is honored to write this bio for him.

Aaron T. Hall I am originally from Miami Florida; however I have spent the past fifteen or so odd years here in northern Illinois. I am currently enrolled in my last semester here at Rock Valley and plan on continuing elsewhere towards a Bachelors degree in digital media arts. My high school photo teacher, Randolph Paul-Peterson, has been the greatest influence in my artistic development. He taught me wonderfully helpful concepts such as composition and design. Art works best when it is the response to one's own human experience, like that time that guy stole my luggage in Tiananmen Square.

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Debbie Hallowell, poetry contributor, wrote a fantastic couplet-ditty the staff found to be spirited, even supplying an ending that can jolt. She couldn't be reached for comment.

Aryn Kresol Anais Nin said, "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are." It is said that no two people are alike, so it is natural to assume that no two people see the world identical as well. Photography, to me, is my way of expressing to the world my thoughts, feelings, and ideas. It is a way for me to share these things with other people; a way to show others what I see, and perhaps give them an understanding of who I am and where I am going.

Oliveur Montgomery Marquise: Anything but dishabille, OM. (his preferred sobriquet) is an expert peripatetic-type egressor; one might call him an intentional individual with a knack for letting change come to him. Commenting on his poem, "Those lovelies are real enough to me. As for if all those shades of hair described grow on the 'belle Venus' at RVC- no comment. But emphatically yes."

Matthew Charles Mickelson Most of my work is based around the idea that humanity has mistakenly and irresponsibly embraced the most destructive delusion the world has ever known- the existence of God. While I believe that personal belief is the right of every individual, the ignorance and fear-mongering that plagues organized religion has been the single greatest catalyst of human malevolence since the dawn of civilization. It is my hope that my writing may help inspire those who live in silent opposition to the oppression of religion to, at the very least, stand up and express themselves without fear or doubt. My deepest thanks to my parents, Ron and Mary Beth Mickelson. For their support and influence, I also thank my friends.

Kyle Pratt is very excited to be in *Voices*. He was born and raised in Rockford and attended Keith School. He dreade[illegible]hers showed him how fun and interesting it could b[illegible]as they do. He would like to thank everyone wh[illegible].

Do Yhup Pyun is the a[illegible]rigued by the artist's unique take on texture in[illegible].

Sarah Stolberg My p[illegible]enings spent curled up in my father's lap beggin[illegible]troduced me to Hans Christian Anderson, Dr. S[illegible]cently graduated from Rock Valley and am curr[illegible]loped an appreciation for fiction and have begu[illegible]empt at science fiction; it may leave you feeling [illegible].

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